Aruna Vasudev is the Founder-President of Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC), Founder-Editor and publisher of Cinemaya, the Asian Film Quarterly (1988-2004) and Founder-Director of CINEFAN, Cinemaya Festival of Asian Cinema, New Delhi (1999 – 2006). She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Paris and has since been a widely published writer and film critic. Aruna started out as a short filmmaker and between 1967 and 1986 she made around 15 documentary films as producer/director for Swedish Television; the Canadian International Development Agency; Belgian Television; War on Want, London; and in India for the Films Division, for Doordarshan, and for the Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi.

Her publications include “Liberty and License in the Indian Cinema” (1979) and “The New Indian Cinema” (1987). She edited “Frames of Mind: Reflections on Indian Cinema” (1995). She was the series editor of six books on Legends of Indian Cinema (2008). Aruna also translated Jean Claude Carriere’s book “A La Recherche du Mahabharata” (2001) (In Search of the Mahabharata; Travels in India with Peter Brook) into English, published by Macmillan. She has contributed essays to a number of books such as “Indian Summer - Films between Ray and Bollywood” (book published in Italy), “Indomania” (book published in France by the Cinematheque Francaise) and others. She has been on the international juries of a large number of film festivals and President for several including Locarno (Switzerland), Cannes (Camera d’Or) and Jeonju (South Korea). She has also been the President of FIPRESCI and NETPAC juries of a great number of film festivals.

Aruna Vasudev has received many awards for her work in promoting cinema especially Asian Cinema through her writings. She has received Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) by the French Government, The Korea Prize from the Pusan International Film Festival, South Korea, The Star of Italian Solidarity by the Italian Government, Promotion of Asian Cinema Award from the Cinemanila Film Festival in the Philippines, Medal of the City of Vesoul, France, Tripoli International Film Festival, The Satyajit Ray Memorial Award, The Kalpana Chawla Award for Excellence for Women, Lifetime Achievement award by Marwah Studios, India, amongst many others. Lebanon, instituted its prize for Best writing on Cinema as the Aruna Vasudev Lifetime Achievement Award.
Passionate Pioneer of Asian Cinema

Aruna Vasudev

Her avatars are many, her passion and singular. Critic, author, editor, painter, maker of documentaries, Trustee and member of numerous panels, committees and advisory boards, Aruna Vasudev is, above all, a torch-bearer of Asian cinema. Founder-editor of Cinemaya: The Asian Film Quarterly and founder of Cinefan, The Festival of Asian Cinema and Arunahas a zest for life and friends and an appetite for the arts, literature and travel. Throughout this trajectory, she has been showered with numerous national and international awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award here in Colombo. That she can pack so much into every day of her life and still make ample room for friends, spare time for her family, remain a bon vivant, be a gracious and generous hostess, keep an open house, mentor and nourish young minds, and continue to dream of new endeavours – all of these are special attributes that have added rich hues to her years even as they have touched the lives of those who have been by her side in her journey. Autumn hasn’t withered her springtime ardour.

Whatever Aruna does, she does with conviction and smiling self-confidence. Once possessed of an idea, she doesn't let go, discussing it with colleagues, honing it, searching for a myriad ways of putting it into action and getting it off the ground. That is how her pet projects – the Asian cinema magazine, the Asian film festival and the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC) was born. Always, the idea came first, it was supreme. The rest – money, publication, distribution, publicity etc. – would follow. Aruna’s persistence, her personality, her persuasive powers, her ability to helm projects, her never-say-die attitude and, happily for all of us, the ‘right’ moment, saw the birth in 1988 of what was to be the first magazine devoted entirely to Asian cinema.

Perhaps the most enjoyable part (for us her colleagues) of putting all this together was the sense of fun and laughter behind which lay the seriousness of intent. The work environment was one of discovery, of surprises and of occasional bewilderment before languages and cultures we did not understand as we initially grappled with the content of the magazine, but invariably, we worked in an atmosphere of conviviality and sharing.

The aim of Cinemaya: The Asian Film Quarterly (launched in 1988) of which Aruna was the founder-editor, was to make Asian cinema known internationally at a time when only a few Asian directors were familiar names in world – and even, ironically, Asian - film circles. But it was a moment when Asian cinema was on the rise, needing only a platform to give it a boost. This is where Aruna stepped in. Cinemaya examined both general trends and specific issues in nearly every Asian country. In a bid to be as authentic as possible, it did this largely through writings by film historians and critics from those very countries rather than by scholars from the West. The year 1989 was landmark one. At the Locarno Film Festival, all three major awards were won, for the first time, by Asia: Bae Yong-kyun's Why has Bodhi Dharma Left for the East (Golden Leopard); Shaji N Karun's The Birth (Silver Leopard) and Abbas Kiarostami’s Where is my Friend’s Home? Aruna was a member of that jury.

The magazine, however, was not the end of the story. Way before Cinefan was launched, Aruna's idea was to present new Indian films and packages on special themes and countries, organise film appreciation courses, and programme for other festivals. In 1989, UNESCO asked Cinemaya to hold a conference on Asian cinema and it was out of this conference (1990) that NETPAC was born. Cinemaya became its official journal and Aruna its Founder and President.
Today, NETPAC Secretariat is located in Colombo - is a mature 25 year-old network with a sturdy record. For over 20 years – through Aruna’s energies - a NETPAC Award for the Best Asian Film has been presented at 30 festivals worldwide, while the annual APSA–NETPAC Development Prize is given away by APSA (Asia Pacific Screen Awards) in Brisbane every year to an emerging Asian talent. Books on Asian cinema have been published and co-published, at least six conferences on Asian cinema held and special packages of Asian films for international festivals created. Cinefan, itself, born in 1999, was a NETPAC festival. So was the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (2007) in Jogjakarta. And then there is Asiapacificfilms.com, a digital film library which streams artistic and culturally important films from this region.

In 2002, Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia (edited by Aruna Vasudev, RashmiDoraiswamy and LatikaPadgaonkar) became the first book to offer a comprehensive overview of the history and aesthetics of around 30 Asian countries. NETPAC was involved in the publication of Kenji Mizoguchi and the Art of Japanese Cinema by Tadao Sato (Translated by BrijTankha and edited by Aruna Vasudev and LatikaPadgaonkar), the first book in English that gives the reader an insider’s view of the oeuvre of this great master. And then came Asian Film Journeys: Selections from Cinemaya,(edited by RashmiDoraiswamy and LatikaPadgaonkar) a collection of pioneering articles that Cinemaya had published before it went over to Osian’s and eventually ceased publication. Aruna pilot all these projects.

And they were possible thanks to her one major strength: an ability to make friends easily and stay in regular touch well before the days of the Internet. Normal friendships proved to be enormous assets, not just in themselves but equally when contributions to the magazine and to the book were needed or when guests and films had to be invited to the festival. It is tough to decline what a determined Aruna offers – or requires.

Cinemaya might have taken up a large chunk of her day, but Aruna always found the time to write and edit. At least half of the 13 books she edited or co-edited and one book she translated from French into English (Jean-Claude Carriere'sA la recherche du Mahabharata- In Search of the Mahabharata: Notes of Travels in India with Peter Brook 1982-1985) were done side by side with her work on the magazine. This, quite apart from the many lengthy essays she penned on cinema for books and publications in India and abroad, from her extensive jury work at national and international film festivals, and from the time spent as a member of prestigious national cinema and television bodies.


For a year in the 1960s, Aruna was a student at IDHEC (Institute of Higher Cinema Studies) in Paris. She went on to work as an apprentice assistant to two distinguished French directors - Alain Resnais for Muriel, and Claude Chabrol for Les Plus Belles Escroqueries du Monde, before moving to New York where, in the United Nations’ Department of Public Information, she served as Programme Assistant, researcher and film editor on the UN television series, “International Zone”. Back in Paris, she edited short films and television programmes for French TV at Antegor, an editing studio, and Madeleine Films, a production company.
As a director and producer of documentaries, she has some 20 films to her credit. These were made between 1967 and 1979 for Swedish Television, the Canadian International Development Agency, Belgian Television, War on Want, London, and in India for the Films Division and Doordarshan.

On her return to India in the early 70s, her field enlarged considerably. She lectured on cinema at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, JamiaMilliaIslamia’s Mass Communication Centre, Sophia College (Mumbai) and at the Film Appreciation courses held at the National Film Archive of India in Pune. As Joint Director Communication at the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), she co-produced (and directed the last episode of) a 13-part series entitled “Viraasat” for national television on the natural environment, conservation and heritage issues.

Her efforts to put Asian cinema on the world map have brought her both recognition and fame. Korea honoured her with a prize at the Pusan festival; the Philippines at Cinemalaya; Vesoul presented her with its City Medal; Ahvaz Festival (Iran) gave her a Lifetime Achievement Award; Tripoli Film Festival (Lebanon) instituted its prize for Best Writing on Cinema as the Aruna Vasudev Lifetime Achievement Award. And the French and Italian governments bestowed on her the esteemed Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and the Star of Italian Solidary respectively. In India, she received the Satyajit Ray Memorial Award from the Asian Film Festival, Mumbai, a Lifetime Achievement Award from International Confederation of NGOs and the KalpanaChawla Award for Excellence for Women.

The indefatigable Aruna has no time to retire. Three years ago, she launched yet another annual event in New Delhi, one that brings her a sense of fulfillment: “The Inner Path: A Festival of Buddhist Films, Art & Philosophy”. And earlier this year, with filmmaker couple Pramod&NeelimaMathur, she set up a Community Cultural Centre for children in the mountain village of Naukuchiatal. This NGO, called UtsahToli, has been designed to give young people in the mountain areas a place to meet, learn and to give expression to their creative talents. (http://formedia.org.in/utsah-toli/index.html)

It’s been a most rewarding course, one that Aruna has carved individually and independently, and at whose heart lies the vision of taking Asian cinema to the world. When she first encountered Asian films, she felt (as she confesses) she was “looking through the key-hole of a closed door; getting tantalizing glimpses of untold wealth. I felt I had to open that door and see and feel and touch those treasures.” Increasingly, though, Aruna, who has forever had a feel for the image and who is a most competent photographer, seems to be turning inwards. She enjoys withdrawing into herself, into her room, paint-brush in hand; and she paints steadily, fine, delicate Japanese brush-strokes, startlingly lovely pictures of leaves and trees and mists and hills, where she finds her peace.

Latika Padgaonkar

Latika Padgaonkar, a Trustee of NETPAC-India, is a writer, editor, translator and former Joint Director, Osian’s-Cinefan Film Festival. A PhD from the University of Sorbonne, she was for several years the Executive Editor of Cinemaya, The Asian Film Quarterly. She has co-edited Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia, The World of Kenji Mizoguchi, Asian Film Journeys: Selections from Cinemaya (NETPAC, 2010); Making News, Breaking News, Her Own Way and Women in Politics. A member of FIPRESCI, she has attended several international film festivals as a jury member. Currently she organizes film festivals in Pune for the Pune International Centre.
Aruna’s Choice
Eternal Thirst (Pyaasa)
India | 1957 | 153 min | Black and White

Synopsis
One of Guru Dutt’s masterpieces, this film tells the story of a poet struggling to find recognition in a materialistic world in which only social outcasts are his true friends. Vijay is an unsuccessful poet whose writings are sold by his brothers as waste paper. Unable to bear the reigning philistinism, he chooses to live on the streets where he meets a young prostitute, Gulab. She falls in love with him and his poetry while Vijay’s former girlfriend marries an arrogant publisher for her comfort and security. When a dead beggar to whom Vijay has given his coat is mistaken for Vijay, Gulab has his poetry published in a book, which becomes a bestseller. Everyone who had previously rejected Vijay now gathers to pay tribute to the ‘dead’ poet. Vijay disrupts the celebration with his appearance and calls for the violent destruction of a corrupt world.

Director : Guru Dutt
Screenplay : Abrar Alvi
Producer : Guru Dutt
DOP : V. K Murthy
Music : S. D Burman
Editor : Y. G Chawhan
Cast : Guru Dutt, Mala Sinha, Waheed Rehman

Vasantha Kumar Shivashankar Padukone (9 July 1925 – 10 October 1964), better known as Guru Dutt, was an Indian film director, producer and actor.
Spring, Summer, Fall winter… and Spring
Korea/Germany | 2003 | 108 min

Synopsis
Two monks – an older man’s his young protégée – share a hermitage floating on a pond in a mountainous landscape. Like others, they too are subject to the power of the seasons and the cycle of creation, sustenance and eventual degeneration. Under the watchful eyes of the old monk, the younger apprentice experiences the loss of innocence, the inevitability of death as well as the intensity of love. Kim’s film is poetically separated into a serious of seasonal vignettes, each season itself acting as a metaphor for the stages of life one goes through.

Director : Kim Ki-duk
Screenplay : Kim Ki-duk
Producer : Kim Dong-Joo
DOP : Back Dong-Hyun
Music : Park Ji-woong
Editor : Kim Ki-duk
Cast : Oh Yeong-su, Kim Ki-duk, Kim Young-min
Awards : NETPAC Award, Youth Jury Award, C.I.C.A.E. Award and Don Quixote Award at Locarno International Film Festival, 2003
Audience Award San Sebastian Film Festival, 2003

Kim Ki-duk is a South Korean film maker noted for his idiosyncratic ‘art house’ cinematic works
When the Tenth Month Comes
Vietnam | 1984 | 100 min | Black and White

Synopsis
Duyen, who learns that her husband has died at the Southwest front tries to protect her dying father-in-law from more sadness by hearing the grief alone. She asks a village teacher to write letters in her husband’s name to the family so that her bedridden father-in-law does not suffer. Some of her close relatives begin to suspect Duyen’s relationship with the teacher. In a cultural performance one night at the community centre, Duyen stars in an ancient popular opera play as a woman seeing her husband off to the front. The woman’s moans re-kindles Duyen’s repressed sorrows.

Director : Dang Nhat Minh
Screenplay : Dang Nhat Minh
DOP : Nguyen Manh Lan, Pham Phuc Dat
Music : Phu Quang
Cast : Le Van, Nguyen Huu Muoi
Awards : Golden Prize, Moscow International Film Festival 1985
Special Jury Award, Hawaii International Film Festival 1985

Dang Nhat Minh
Dang Nhat Minh, born in Vietnam, has made more than 10 documentaries and 30 feature films. He has received many prizes and awards from national and international film festivals.